

The THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN

Number Sixteen

July, 1946

OUR FOURTH ANNUAL MEETING

(Although our society was founded in 1941, there have been only four annual meetings, two having been canceled due to wartime transportation conditions. Below follows the official minutes of the meeting.)

The fourth annual meeting of the Thoreau Society was opened at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday July 13, 1946, at the First Parish Church in Concord, Mass., with Raymond Adams, president of the society, in the chair.

The minutes of the last annual meeting (July, 1944) were read by the secretary, Walter Harding, and accepted by the society. The secretary also read a brief report on the activities of the society over the past two years, and a treasurer's report, listing the total funds of the society on hand at the moment as \$551.00.

A motion was made by the secretary that the society annually reprint in facsimile one outstanding article pertaining to Thoreau. The motion was accepted.

A motion was made by Roland D. Sawyer that the secretary read into the records an account of the special meeting held in Concord on July 4, 1945 by the Concord group in commemoration of the centenary of Thoreau's going to Walden. (Reports of this meeting will be found in the bulletins for July and October, 1945).

A motion was made by Leonard Kleinfeld and accepted that the Thoreau Society go on record as approving a Thoreau Memorial Fund to establish a Thoreau house in Concord, the fund to be administered by a board of six trustees to be appointed by the president for a term of six years each, rotating at periods of two years.

An amendment to this motion was offered and accepted that the phrase "to establish a Thoreau house in Concord" be dropped, leaving the decision as to the type of memorial up to the trustees.

A second amendment was offered but rejected that final decision on any memorial adopted by the trustees be referred to the society as a whole.

A motion was made and accepted that a copy of the Thoreau family tree, compiled by Dr. Raymond Adams, be included in the bulletin at the earliest convenient moment.

A report from the nominating committee was read by Leonard Kleinfeld and the society instructed the secretary to cast a unanimous ballot for the following slate, as submitted by the committee:

President: Raymond Adams, Chapel Hill, N.C.

Vice-president: Mrs. Caleb Wheeler, Concord, Mass.

Secretary-treasurer: Walter Harding, Bridgewater, Mass.

Executive committee:

The president, vice-president, and secretary, ex-officio.

Wallace B. Conant, Concord, Mass.

C. Winthrop Lee, Concord, Mass.

H. W. L. Dana, Cambridge, Mass.

Clayton Hoagland, Rutherford, N.J.

Regional correspondents:

Mrs. J.G. Chapman, Berkeley, Calif.

T. L. Bailey, Cleveland, Ohio

Ira Hoover, Philadelphia, Penn.

Leonard Kleinfeld, Forest Hills, L.I.

E. B. Hill, Tempe, Ariz.

Mrs. Florence Lennon, Boulder, Col.

Mr. Frederick Zebcock, Chicago, Ill.

W. Stephen Thomas, Rochester, N.Y.

G. Winthrop Lee, Concord, Mass.

The business meeting was then adjourned to the afternoon session, whereupon it was resumed at 2:30 p.m., with Dr. Adams in the chair.

A motion was made and accepted that a vote of thanks be extended the secretary.

A motion was made and accepted that the secretary be instructed to send a message to Mr. Allen French of Concord in appreciation of his many contributions to the well-being of the society and to express the regret of the society for his present illness.

A motion was made and accepted that a committee be appointed by the president to consider and carry through a plan for a memorial to be constructed at the site of Thoreau's hut on Walden Pond.

A motion was made and accepted that the society donate an inscribed stone for said memorial.

A motion was made and accepted that a vote of thanks be extended to Roland Wells Robbins in appreciation of his labors in discovering the site of Thoreau's hut.

A motion was made and accepted that Mr. Robbins' report of his discovery of the hut site be accepted with appreciation and that the society desires to express its conviction that the discovery is of such importance and authenticity that the site should be properly marked and the society further resolves that the Commissioners of Middlesex County be thanked for their interest and their very substantial aid in the marking of the site.

The president announced his appointment of the following committees:

Thoreau Memorial Fund trustees:

For a term of six years:

Leonard Kleinfeld, New York, N.Y.

Mrs. Leslie Anderson, Concord, Mass.

For a term of four years:

Egbert Newbury Jr., Concord, Mass.

T.L. Bailey, Cleveland, Ohio.

For a term of two years:

Raymond Emerson, Concord, Mass.

Raymond Adams, Chapel Hill, N.C.

A committee to decide upon a suitable memorial for the Walden Pond hut site.

Raymond Emerson, Concord, Mass.

Egbert Newbury Jr., Concord, Mass.

T. Mott Shaw, Concord, Mass.

Roland W. Robbins, Concord, Mass.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

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For the sake of those who were unable to attend the meeting, the following notes may help to make clear some points of the report:

It has been decided to reprint Dr. Samuel Arthur Jones' article on Thoreau's incarceration from the INLANDER of the 1890's as the first annual reprint of the society. This article is the most detailed account of Thoreau's imprisonment ever written and is now almost impossible to obtain except in a few widely scattered libraries. It will be reprinted in commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of Thoreau's night in jail in July, 1846 and mailed out to our members at the earliest possible moment.

The Thoreau Memorial Fund was originally established by the New York group and now has been taken over by the national society. The purpose of the fund is to establish at some later date, when sufficient funds have been raised, a suitable memorial to Thoreau in Concord. Among the suggestions which have been advanced are (1) the purchase of a house in which Thoreau has lived and the establishment therein of a Thoreau "shrine" and museum, (2) the erection of a statue of Thoreau at Walden Pond, (3) the erection of a Thoreau Wing at the Antiquarian Society buildings, and (4) the establishment of a Thoreau library. Contributions to the fund are deductible on income tax forms. Contributions should be sent to Leonard Kleinfeld at 150 Nassau Street, New York, N.Y.

The commissioners of Middlesex County have set aside one thousand dollars to suitably mark the site of Thoreau's hut at Walden Pond as discovered by Roland Robbins. While final plans have not been decided upon, most popular at the moment seems to be the suggestion to mark the corners of the hut with granite posts and pave the area with fieldstone from the Thoreau Birthplace, donated by Mrs. Caleb Wheeler. A stone to be presented by the society will be placed directly over the chimney foundation and appropriately inscribed.

This has been a formal report of a very informal meeting. All of the rest of the week-end was devoted to walks around the town and gatherings on the doorsteps. Concord was crowded with Thoreauvians. More than 175 crowded into the First Parish Vestry for the meetings. Every seat was taken at the luncheon served in Colonial Inn and an overflow crowd flooded the inn's porches and sitting rooms.

The speaker of the morning was Walter Prichard Eaton, Acting Head of the Drama Department of Yale University, who spoke on "Thoreau's Relation to Nature." Comparing Thoreau with the other great nature writers, Muir, Burroughs, and Gilbert White, Prof. Eaton stated that Thoreau stood out above them all through his very intensity. Reading passages from Muir's famous essay on a hurricane in the forest, he contrasted it with a paragraph from Thoreau's Journals on a breeze in the grass of Concord fields, demonstrating Thoreau's ability to create the significant out of the seemingly insignificant.

The speaker of the afternoon was Roland Wells Robbins of Lincoln, Mass. who gave a detailed account of his discovery of the foundation of Thoreau's chimney foundation at Walden Pond. Elsewhere in this bulletin we are reprinting portions of Mr. Robbins' story. He is also preparing a fully documented account of his excavations which he will publish in a strictly limited edition for \$1.50 a copy. Those who wish to obtain copies of this book should place orders now with the author: Roland Wells Robbins, RFD #1, Concord, Mass.

On display at the rear of the vestry throughout the day was an exhibition of the artifacts uncovered by Mr. Robbins, photographs of his work, a thorough documentation of the authenticity of his discovery, and a beautifully constructed model of the scene of the discovery with the proposed memorial, constructed by Louise Stimson of Concord. It is to be hoped that at some future date a large part of this carefully prepared exhibition may be set up permanently some place in Concord for students and visitors to examine.

In the late afternoon, Mr. Robbins led the members of the society to the hut site and there before their eyes succeeded in uncovering several more of the original bricks from Thoreau's chimney.

BOOK REVIEWS

Thoreau, Henry David. LIFE WITHOUT PRINCIPLE: THREE ESSAYS BY HENRY DAVID THOREAU WITH A PREFACE BY HENRY MILLER. Stanford University, California: James Ladd Delkin, 1946. 64pp. \$4.50. Edition limited to 500 copies.

One of the most controversial writers on the American scene today is Henry Miller. Like Thoreau in his lifetime, the sale of his writings have been small, but they have received wide and stormy notice. When as explosive a critic as he turns to as dynamic a writer as Thoreau, something not far short of a Hiroshima should result-- and in this case it has. In eight short pages of introduction to Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience," "Life without Principle," and "John Brown's Body," Henry Miller has got down to the very bottom of Thoreau's message for today. To him Thoreau is no frightened skulker escaping to the wilderness, but an "aristocrat of the spirit," "the sort of person who, if there were more of his kind, would soon cause governments to become non-existent." "Compromise was not in his vocabulary." "Viewed now from the heights of our decadence, he seems almost

like an early Roman. The word virtue has meaning again, when connected with his name."

Miller goes on into one of the most penetrating analyses of Thoreau that I have ever seen. This is one of the few prefaces to Thoreau's writings that I have seen that can stand up beside the work it introduces. My only regret is that it has been published in an expensive, limited edition. Personally I would like to see it spread broadcast across the nation, around the world, by the thousands. It might help bring back that revival of the individual spirit that Thoreau himself so wanted.

I am not a member of that adoring little circle of disciples that has gathered around Miller. I have read some of his works with pleasure--but a great many more with boredom. It seems to me he lacks an ability for self-criticism. But in this particular preface he has turned out a masterly piece of criticism. I hope every student of Thoreau will read it diligently. I wish every citizen of the world would pay it heed.

Newcomb, Charles King. THE JOURNALS OF. Edited by Judith Kennedy Johnson. Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press, 1946. 299pp. \$4.00.

Slowly but surely the unpublished writings of the Transcendentalists are getting into print. Here we have the heart of the journal of Thoreau's Providence friend, Charles King Newcomb. Unfortunately it contains almost no mention of Thoreau himself, for Newcomb's mind dwelt on ethereal things and not mundane affairs. However the book does offer a good portrait of the mind of a decidedly minor member of the group (despite Emerson's assertion that he possessed one of the greatest minds) and the long and scholarly introduction by Dr. Johnson gives the only authoritative account of his life. I hope that Dr. Johnson's work will encourage other students to edit and publish the journals of such men as Ellery Channing and F. B. Sanborn.

Mr. W. B. Conant of Concord raises an interesting question on Thoreau's Civil Disobedience: Under what law was Thoreau arrested and put into prison for non-payment of taxes? When was imprisonment for debt outlawed? Possibly Sam Staples, the constable, went beyond the law in arresting Thoreau. Possibly confirming Mr. Conant's suspicions is this note from Hubert Hoeltje's "Thoreau in Concord Church and Town Records" (NEW ENGLAND QUARTERLY, June, 1939):

The occasion (Thoreau's arrest) was wholly ignored in the official records. . . . The genial Sam Staples, who arrested Thoreau and escorted him to jail, customarily assumed very broad and loose powers in his capacity as officer of the law, his own decisions apparently sufficing as warrant for arrest. (p.353).

Speaking of "Civil Disobedience," S. R. Shapiro calls our attention to this excerpt from Lillian Wald's autobiography (THE HOUSE ON HENRY STREET. New York: Holt, 1915. pp.277-8):

I recall the indignation of a young man just graduated from one of our universities when chance took him into an East Side hall where a well known anarchist was addressing a large and attentive audience and reading selections from Thoreau. Without any obvious provocation the police jumped upon the platform, and took the woman and those who sat with her, refused them permission to call a cab, and drove them in the patrol wagon to the police station. We might add that the "well known anarchist" was obviously Emma Goldman who often in her writings spoke of her high regard for Thoreau.

As a special supplement to this issue of the bulletin, we are enclosing a map of Thoreau's journeys in the Maine Woods. This map was drawn by Robert F. Stowell of 3 Forest Street, Cambridge, Mass. Mr. Stowell is at work on an atlas of the Thoreau country and would appreciate the advice and criticism of any of our members in his work.

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Our members have frequently requested that a list of all the members of the society with their addresses be furnished so that a member traveling in any section of the country may easily locate his fellow-Thoreauvians. We issue this first membership list experimentally. If it proves to be worthwhile, it may perhaps be issued annually in the future. Please send to the secretary any criticisms or corrections of the listings.

OFFICERS OF THE THOREAU SOCIETY

President: Raymond Adams, Chapel Hill, N.C.
 Vice-president: Mrs. Caleb Wheeler, Concord, Mass.
 Secretary-treasurer: Walter Harding, 54 Prospect St., Bridgewater, Mass.

Executive committee: The officers of the society, Wallace Conant, G. Winthrop Lee, H.W.L. Dana, and Clayton Hoagland.

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 Maude Doolittle, Princeton, Mass.
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 Sara Dunbar, 308 Somerset Ave, Taunton, Mass.
 Dan Dungan, 4908 Lee St, Downers Grove, Ill.
 Public Library, East Bridgewater, Mass.
 Walter Prichard Eaton, Sheffield, Mass.
 Allen Edminster, 344 Washington St, Dover, N.H.
 Phillip English, 99 E. Rock Road, New Haven, Conn.
 Robert Fenn, Main Lab, Bld 14, USNH, San Diego, Cal.
 Vernon Ferris, 106 E. John St, Champaign, Ill.
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 Cynthia Hanna, Knight Hall, U. of Wyo, Laramie, Wyo.
 Walter Harding, 54 Prospect St, Bridgewater, Mass.
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 Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Mass.
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Thoreau Cabin Hearth Found



Wallace Conant, President, Concord-Emerson-Thoreau Group, and Roland W. Robbins, excavator of cabin chimney foundation, after location of Thoreau site at Walden Pond. Mr. Robbins came upon the remains of the foundation after

three months of digging, employing a dollar compass, a ninety-eight-cent G. I. trench shovel, three four-foot steel rods, with a dollar edition of Thoreau's "Walden" as a guide. Plans for a memorial marking the site are being drafted.

Here's how Mr. Robbins went "House Hunting for Henry David Thoreau" in his own words:

"To those who chanced to visit Thoreau's cairn at Walden Pond during September, October, and November, 1945, and were puzzled to find a full grown man down on his hands and knees, digging in the soil, this story should tend to reflect a more pleasant respect for his actions.

"One hundred years earlier, Henry David Thoreau had spent part of the spring and summer digging and building his 10-by-15-foot cabin in the Walden woods. Shortly after Thoreau vacated his wilderness home in 1847, the cabin was moved. In the half century that followed, time and erosion removed all evidence of the cabin's site.

"Bronson Alcott and Mrs. Adams of Dubuque, Iowa, erected a cairn in June, 1872. Fifty or so years later a professor from the south set four granite posts in a location he believed to have been the site. But Thoreau students would show with Thoreau's own words where neither the cairn or the granite markers could possibly mark the true site of the cabin.

"Concord's eminent historian, Allen French, knowing my zeal for historical research, asked if I would see what I could do with the problem. I purchased a dollar edition of Thoreau's Walden.

"Then with the help of Aaron Bagge of Holyoke, Mass., I made an analysis of Thoreau's references to his cabin's construction and location. But he added so many extraneous details that many spots along the banks of Thoreau's cove would accommodate my mental picture of the cabin. So much so that I decided to turn to excavating.

"I received permission from the Middlesex County Commissioner and overseer, Fred Hart, to carry out excavating on the Walden Pond reservation. Purchasing a dollar compass, a 98-cent trench shovel, as well as a larger shovel, and having a blacksmith make up three- and four-foot steel rods to prod the soil with, I headed to Walden Pond intent on having the earth reveal its secret.

"One passage in Walden I felt was the key to the whole solution:

"I laid the foundation of a chimney at one end, bringing two earthen loads of stones up the hill from

the pond in my arms.' Surely some evidence of this chimney foundation must remain.

"Recalling a spot where Mrs. Caleb Wheeler of Concord found brick fragments, I began my digging there. And well I did; for I located 100 pieces of brick embedded two to seven inches in the ground. This proved to be the pathway Thoreau had taken from his pile of 'one thousand old brick' to where he was building.

"Several days later I discovered the spot where the brick had been piled. It was an area about eight feet square and from it I removed 2,000 pieces of brick, most of which were small in size."

"Sunday afternoon, Oct. 28, I struck a solid object embedded about a foot in the ground, beneath a large white pine tree. Approaching it with an attitude of 'Here I go again,' I brought up large quantities of plaster and brick, as well as old square nails and window glass.

"The brick-had mortar on them and much of the evidence was smoke-blackened. Right from the very fireplace itself, I concluded. Further digging led me under the tree itself. What a seal of authenticity, I smiled.

"Whatcha looking for?" inquired a voice. Looking up startled, I found two young U. S. Army sergeants viewing my labors. The taller of the two plied me with many questions about Thoreau and his life at Walden. Fearing he was annoying me, he apologized, 'Sorry to bother you, sir, but you see, I am a distant relative of Henry David Thoreau. I live in California and I am on my way home from the European Theater of Operations. I have never been here before—may never be here again, so naturally, I am anxious to learn what I can of the place.'

Relative Is Witness
"You don't mind, my asking your name?" I inquired. 'I am Henry D. Thoreau, Jr.,' he replied. I don't recall what held me upright on hearing this—surely it wasn't my legs. Henry D. Thoreau, Jr., the first witness to the first evidence found of the original Henry's cabin.

"Before I could recover from this pleasant surprise, Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Conant of Concord arrived with three guests. Mr. Conant is President of Concord's Emerson-Thoreau group. 'Mr.

Conant, I would like to have you meet Henry D. Thoreau,' I said. Mr. Conant very cordially accepted Sgt. Thoreau's hand in both of his, saying 'How do you do, Mr. Thoreau?' Then, while still grasping Sgt. Thoreau's hand, he turned to the other soldier and with his dry Yankee humor asked, 'And who is this? Ralph Waldo Emerson?' Poor Sergeant Thoreau, He blushed, and fumbling about for his G. I. dog tag said, 'My name is Henry D. Thoreau, Jr. Here, see for yourself.' Sure enough, 'Henry D. Thoreau, Jr.' it read.

"But late Armistice day my prodding rod struck the southwest corner of the long-sought, much-debated pile of stone, late in the afternoon, Nov. 12 I spent the day digging and by evening had uncovered the entire remains of the cabin's chimney foundation.

"How unusual that it should be

on November 12. For Thoreau in his 1845 Journal wrote, 'Left house on account of plastering, Wednesday, November 12th, at night, returned Saturday, December 6th.' One hundred years to the day the cabin was finished, its chimney foundation was brought to light.

"The chimney foundation is a five-foot square. Thoreau used brick in its construction for wedging purposes. As well as built the northeast corner of the foundation almost entirely of brick. Apparently the top layer of the foundation was removed by Hugh Whelan, Emerson's hired man, for his own purposes, when he moved the cabin.

"Erosion had placed a foot of soil over the remains of the foundation which accounts for its disappearance from the earth's surface. It has been witnessed, photographed, and carefully recovered. Its location will remain a secret until present plans for erecting a shrine about it have been carried out.

"Then, Thoreau students, and the many thousands of visitors who annually call on Concord, can view the cabin's chimney foundation remains and see the work of Thoreau's physical labor."

The adjacent article by Mr. Roland Wells Robbins was reprinted from the June 13, 1946 CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR with the kind permission of its editors.

Milton Academy, Milton, Mass., held a small Thoreau exhibition recently.

Mrs. Roosevelt when asked in the February LADIES HOME JOURNAL concerning the origin of FD's famed remark, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself," replied that it was original with him. Astute Thoreavians however will be quick to quote his Journal for Sept. 7, 1851, "Nothing is so much to be feared as fear." There is also said to be a similar passage in Bacon's essays.

Gypsy Rose Lee complains in the April READER'S DIGEST, "Everyone's always making with double-talk about Thoreau. Why, I can't get my hair curled without the hair-dresser bending my ear about him."

Edwin Way Teale is preparing a new illustrated edition of WALDEN to be published in the fall by Dodd, Mead. Members attending our Concord meeting saw him taking his final photographs for the book.

The Columbia Broadcasting System devoted a half hour's program in their "American Portrait" series on April 27th to a biographical dramatization of the Sage of Walden.

The May MERCURY devotes half a page to a quotation from Thoreau's Journals.

REMARKABLE COINCIDENCE DEPT.

"Mistrust all enterprises that require new clothes."--ROOM WITH A VIEW, E.M.Forster.

"Beware of all enterprises that require new clothes."--WALDEN, Thoreau.

--THE MONTH AT GOOSPEED'S, January, 1946

AN UNNOTICED EARLY REVIEW OF WALDEN

In going through some of the early files of the Providence (R.I.) JOURNAL, your secretary discovered this previously unlisted brief review of Thoreau's book: Walden: or Life in the Woods. By Henry D. Thoreau. Boston: Ticknor & Fields.

The author of this book, having his own ideas about life, built him a shanty on the banks of Walden Pond, in Concord, Mass., and lived there upon the labor of his hands for more than two years. This book is the story of his life, and as the incidents were not remarkably stirring, he has filled up the pages with his philosophy, which is shrewd and eccentric; and, altogether, the book is worth reading, which is saying a good deal in these times.

--August 11, 1854.

Uncovered at the same time was this lecture notice in the same paper:

Independent Lectures. The fourth lecture of the course will be delivered in Railroad Hall, on Wednesday evening, Dec. 6th, by Henry D. Thoreau, (Author of Life in the Woods,) of Concord, Mass.

Tickets for the Course \$1. Evening tickets 25 cents. For sale at the bookstores and at Leland's Music store, 165 Westminster st.

Doors open at 6½. Lecture to commence at 7½ o'clock.

--December 5, 1854.

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The Thoreau Society is an informal organization of friends and followers of Henry David Thoreau, scattered across the country and abroad. Membership is open to anyone interested. Fees are one dollar a year. This bulletin is issued occasionally, usually quarterly, by the secretary. Officers of the society are Raymond Adams, Chapel Hill, N.C., president; Mrs. Caleb Wheeler, Concord, Mass., vice-president; and Walter Harding, 54 Prospect Street, Bridgewater, Mass., secretary-treasurer.

Communications concerning this issue should be addressed to the secretary at his summer address (through September 1st):

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